

**THE USE OF QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES AS A STRATEGY TO
ENHANCE STUDENTS' RESPONSES DURING ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LESSONS**

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Statement of Originality

The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgement	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Abstract	xi
<i>Abstrak</i>	xii

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.0	Chapter Preview	1
1.1	Background of the Study	1
1.2	Statement of the Problem	5
1.3	Research Objectives	6
1.4	Research Questions	7
1.5	Significance of the Study	7
1.6	Definition of Terms	8
	1.6.1 Questioning Technique	8
	1.6.2 Questioning Frequency	9
	1.6.3 Display Question	9
	1.6.4 Referential Question	9
	1.6.5 Prompting Question	10
	1.6.6 Probing Question	10
	1.6.7 Redirecting Question	10
	1.6.8 Rephrasing Question	11
	1.6.9 Students' Responses	11
1.7	Scope of the Study	11
1.8	Chapter Review	12

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0	Chapter Preview	13
2.1	Theories	13
	2.1.1 Krashen's Output Hypothesis	14
	2.1.2 Swain's Output Hypothesis	16
	2.1.3 Long's Interaction Hypothesis	18
	2.1.4 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory	19
2.2	Definition of a Question	20
2.3	Classroom Questioning	21
2.4	Frequency of Classroom Questioning	21
2.5	Purpose of Questioning	22
2.6	Types of Questions	23
	2.6.1 Bloom's Taxonomy	23
	2.6.2 Display and Referential Questions	28

2.7	Classification of Questions	31
2.7.1	Prompting Question	31
2.7.2	Probing Question	32
2.7.3	Redirecting Question	33
2.7.4	Rephrasing Question	34
2.8	Conclusion	36

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0	Chapter Preview	37
3.1	Research Design	37
3.2	Population and Sample	39
3.3	Research Instruments	40
3.3.1	Observation Notes	41
3.3.2	Tape Recorder	42
3.4	Data Collection Procedures	43
3.4.1	Actual Research	43
3.4.1.1	Identification of Participants	44
3.4.1.2	Observation	44
3.4.1.3	Audio Recording	46
3.5	Data Analysis Procedures	46
3.6	Limitations of the Study	51
3.7	Chapter Review	52

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0	Chapter Preview	53
4.1	Profile of Respondents	53
4.2	Research Findings	55
4.2.1	Average Number of Questions Asked by Teachers	55
4.2.2	Types of Questions Used by Teachers	57
4.2.3	Types of Questioning Techniques Used by Teachers	60
4.2.4	Questioning Techniques Used by Teachers with Students of Different Proficiency Levels	65
4.2.5	Questioning Techniques that Help to Build Students' Responses during English Lessons	69
4.3	Summary	82
4.4	Chapter Review	84

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.0	Chapter Preview	85
5.1	Summary	85
5.2	Implications of the Findings	90
5.3	Recommendations for Future Research	92
5.4	Conclusion	93

APPENDICES

Appendix A	
Approval Letter from Education Planning and Research Division (EPRD), Ministry of Education, Malaysia	107
Appendix B	
Approval Letter from Sarawak State Education Department	109
Appendix C	
Data Collection Schedule	111

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Observation Note	42
Table 3.2 Data Collection Schedule	45
Table 3.3 Guidelines for Analyzing Question Types and Questioning Techniques	48
Table 4.1 Students' Profile	54
Table 4.2 Teachers' Profile	54

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.3 Frequency of Questioning	56
Figure 4.4 Types of Questions	59
Figure 4.5 Frequency of Prompting Question	60
Figure 4.6 Frequency of Probing Question	61
Figure 4.7 Frequency of Redirecting Question	63
Figure 4.8 Frequency of Rephrasing Question	64
Figure 4.9 Types of Questions Asked to Deal with Students of Different Performance Levels	66
Figure 4.10 Types of Questioning Techniques Asked to Deal with Students of Different Performance Levels	68
Figure 4.11 Frequencies of Students' Responses to Display Questions	70
Figure 4.12 Frequencies of Students' Responses to Referential Questions	73

ABSTRACT

THE USE OF QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES AS A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' RESPONSES DURING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LESSONS

Tan Yee Suan

The present study examines the use of questioning techniques as a strategy to enhance students' responses during English language lessons. It is devised specifically to answer five research objectives, that is to 'determine the average number of questions asked by teachers', 'identify the types of questions used by teachers', 'identify the questioning techniques used by teachers', 'identify whether teachers' questioning techniques vary with students of different proficiency levels' and 'analyse whether teachers' questioning techniques help in building students' responses during an English language lesson'. This qualitative study adopted the case study format that employed two instruments, namely observation notes and a tape recorder. The sample respondents were taken from five classes of Form Two students as well as their English language teachers. Fifteen observations of classroom proceedings were audio-recorded for a period of three weeks. Observation notes that focused on teachers' questions and students' responses in a classroom discourse were written down to ensure the accuracy of the data. The recorded conversations were played numerous times to double check the reliability of the observation notes. After that, the data collected were further compiled, analyzed, tabulated and explained with reference to the research questions mentioned in this study. The findings of the study revealed that the average number of questions asked per lesson was pitched at thirty-five questions in a forty minutes lesson. Besides, the findings also implied that both teachers had directed numerous questions towards their students. However, most of the questions asked were display questions, which mean to elicit factual information. Moreover, the study also indicated that questioning techniques such as prompting, probing, redirecting and rephrasing questions were able to encourage students to respond actively in class despite the fact that rephrasing question was the only questioning technique employed in the four lessons observed. Furthermore, the study also signified that teachers used different types of questions to deal with students of different abilities. Here, there is likelihood for the teacher to pose more referential and probing questions to the advanced students. As for the weaker students, they were posed with more display and prompting questions. Also, it was concluded that not all questioning techniques were able to build up students' responses in class. In fact, referential, prompting, probing, rephrasing and redirecting questions were the only questioning techniques that help the students to build their responses in class to a certain extent. Further explanation on the results can be found in the report.

ABSTRAK

KEBERKESANAN TEKNIK PENYOALAN DALAM PENINGKATAN RESPONS PELAJAR SEMASA PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS

Tan Yee Suan

Kajian kes ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat keberkesanan teknik penyoalan dalam peningkatan respons pelajar semasa pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Ia ditulis untuk menjawab lima objektif, iaitu 'menentukan purata soalan yang ditanya oleh guru', 'menentukan jenis soalan yang digunakan oleh guru', 'menentukan kaedah penyoalan yang digunakan oleh guru', 'menentukan sama ada kaedah penyoalan guru berbeza antara kumpulan pelajar yang baik dan lemah' dan 'menentukan sejauh manakah kaedah penyoalan guru membantu para pelajar memperbaiki respons mereka'. Peserta-peserta kajian terdiri daripada lima kelas pelajar Tingkatan Dua dan guru Bahasa Inggeris mereka di sebuah sekolah menengah di Kuching, Sarawak. Lima belas interaksi lisan antara guru dan para pelajar dilakukan secara pemerhatian dan dirakamkan dalam kaset audio. Catatan tambahan yang memberi fokus kepada soalan guru dan respons pelajar juga dibuat untuk mengelakkan ketidakjelasan maklumat yang dikumpul melalui kaset audio. Rakaman interaksi lisan antara guru dan para pelajar dimainkan beberapa kali untuk memastikan kebenaran data. Kemudian, semua data yang dikumpul akan dianalisis secara terperinci dan penerangan yang lanjut akan diberikan berdasarkan kepada lima objektif penyelidikan yang disebut sebelum ini. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa secara purata, seorang guru telah mengemukakan sebanyak tiga puluh lima soalan dalam waktu Bahasa Inggeris yang merangkumi tempoh masa empat puluh minit. Hasil kajian juga menyatakan bahawa kedua-dua orang guru telah menggunakan 'soalan display' dan 'soalan referential' terhadap pelajar-pelajar mereka. Namun demikian, sebilangan besar soalan-soalan yang ditanya merupakan 'soalan display' (soalan kognitif beraras rendah) yang hanya memerlukan para pelajar mengimbas semula fakta yang sedia tersimpan dalam minda mereka. Keputusan kajian juga mendapati bahawa kaedah penyoalan seperti 'prompting', 'probing', 'redirecting' dan 'rephrasing' turut membuka peluang kepada para pelajar untuk melibatkan diri dengan lebih aktif dalam proses pembelajaran walaupun 'rephrasing' merupakan satu-satunya kaedah penyoalan yang digunakan oleh guru-guru dalam setiap sesi pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini juga menyatakan bahawa guru-guru menggunakan kaedah penyoalan yang berbeza untuk kumpulan pelajar yang baik dan lemah. Guru-guru mengemukakan 'soalan referential' dan 'probing' (soalan beraras kognitif tinggi) kepada kumpulan pelajar yang pandai manakala mengemukakan 'soalan display' dan 'prompting' kepada kumpulan pelajar yang lebih lemah. Malahan, ia dikatakan bahawa bukan semua kaedah penyoalan dapat membantu para pelajar membina respons mereka dalam waktu Bahasa Inggeris. Sebaliknya, 'soalan referential', 'prompting', 'probing', 'redirecting' dan 'rephrasing' merupakan kaedah penyoalan yang dapat membantu para pelajar memperbaiki respons mereka dalam waktu Bahasa Inggeris.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Preview

The topic looks into the use of questioning techniques as a strategy to enhance students' responses in English language lessons. Background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, definition of terms, significance and scope of the study will be further discussed in this chapter.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the past few decades, the act of questioning has become part and parcel of our lives. This is because we, human beings are curious in nature. We tend to get attracted by things that are happening around us. Due to this idle curiosity, we never run out of questions in our daily lives. Instead, we are more likely to satisfy our curiosity by asking a great deal of questions. Therefore, it is quite common to see us asking questions when we are inherently curious in understanding why and how things exist the way they are. Besides, it is also argued that a life without

curiosity is simply a boring life. Thus, there is a dire need for us to equip ourselves with questions to inform ourselves of the environment around us.

Besides playing an important part in real lives, the act of questioning is also applicable to classroom settings. This is because teacher questioning is viewed as one of the central aspects that contributes to the enhancement of the teaching and learning process. Questions from teachers are common in all classrooms. Questions from teachers are asked to provoke interests, assess knowledge and make students think. Therefore, it is noted that a teacher is persistently asking for students' responses if he or she is standing in front of the class asking questions, or probing for answers from students. In this case, asking questions appears to be one of the most widely used techniques of getting students to respond in class (Gall, 1984).

To create an interactive, learner-centered environment, Communicative Approach has been proposed (Larsen-Freeman, 1986) and is practised by schools (elementary, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels) all over Malaysia. Generally, this approach emphasizes on students' ability to communicate and express ideas in classroom interactions and this is indicative of an actual learning. Participation in class is given emphasis as numerous studies have shown that the involvement of students in learning will necessarily lead to quality teaching (Gibbs, 1992).

Under this condition, students are seen as responsible managers of their own learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). For instance, the students play an active role and they are the ones who do most of the speaking in class whereas teachers are seen as passive contributors, who talk less and monitor the students' progress in the classrooms regularly (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). It is fervently hoped that the increased responsibility of getting students to participate in classrooms can aid them to gain confidence in using the target language. Within the Malaysian classroom context, there has been considerable concern where students are reluctant to respond in class. In short, this simply means that the students do not play an active role and do not give their response to questions asked in class even

though they understand the question, know the answer, and are able to produce the answer.

There is evidence where Malaysian students are regarded as passive learners. Goh (2008) claimed that the students were unable to bring themselves to participate in class even though they had the eagerness to learn. This is because students were more likely to restrict themselves from expressing their opinions in the middle of the lecture. Indeed, most of them had the likelihood to remain silent and speak only when they were called upon by the teacher. Because of that, the questions posed were frequently met with silence and thus, it is necessary for the teacher to prompt a student to provide an answer to the question asked in class.

From the study mentioned above, it can be seen that the students were very reticent and thus, make it difficult for the teachers to get the students to participate in classroom interactions. A few reasons have been highlighted for students' lack of eagerness to interact in the classroom. The first reason is closely associated to students' shyness (Buss, 1980). Here, students' shyness is highlighted because there are students who feel more comfortable to listen rather than to speak up in front of the class. Therefore, a teacher who forces the students to say something in class would definitely place a lot of pressure on the students. As the consequence, there is likelihood for the students to avoid eye contact from the teacher when they are posed with questions.

The second reason is based on the misconceptions about teachers. Ahmet et al. (2007) indicated that students often perceived teachers as stern authoritative figures in class. This means that teachers are the ones who dominate the classroom whereas students listen attentively and receive what the teachers convey in class. Therefore, students tend to have a certain beliefs that teachers are knowledge providers, and thus, are the ones who are to be held responsible for imparting knowledge and skills. Due to this reason, students are more likely to keep quiet all the time and wait for their teacher to provide the knowledge that

they are going to learn without doing much thinking. Thus, this constitutes a learning culture that has negative impacts on students' lives.

The third reason is closely associated to students' poor language proficiency. It is widely known that students do not want to speak in class because they do not have the competence to speak in the target language. Therefore, they are more likely to experience a sense of anxiety, embarrassment and low self-esteem when they are asked to speak in front of their peers. This is further supported by Woodrow (2006) who believed that anxiety in speaking constitutes a negative relationship to oral performance in second language learning classrooms. In this situation, students are more likely to evoke some negative attitudes towards learning. As a result, the students are more likely to be inactive in class (Chuska, 1995) as they think this can protect them from making a mistake, from being laughed at by peers, or from being negatively humiliated by the teacher (Ahmed Kassem, 2004).

Due to the reasons stated above, there is a predisposition for teachers to do the thinking instead of getting the students to think in class. This is to avoid a slow-paced lesson after taking into consideration that teachers do not have sufficient teaching hours to meet the needs of the students in class. Thus, teachers are more likely to employ conventional teaching methods that require them to dominate most of the talking in class. As a result, this contributes to the development of 'spoon-fed culture'.

However, the culture of 'spoon-feeding' should not be encouraged in schools because it can be counterproductive for the students. For instance, students will be prohibited from generating and expressing their opinions openly (Kordalewski, 1999). This eventually hampers the students from participation and hence, hinders the creation of a supportive classroom environment. Students are currently seen as the passive recipients of knowledge where they are more likely to expect answers from teachers rather than use their own thinking to achieve the

goals. This is not in line with the Communicative Approach which places greater emphasis on students' participation in classrooms (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

As stated by Lynch (1991), it should not be the case that learning occurs best when there is interaction between students and teacher in class. In other words, this means that the more students interact in class, the higher the probability for them to acquire the target language successfully. One of the activities that can help teachers to maintain the students' interaction in class is via the use of questioning techniques. In view of the importance of teacher questioning in getting students to participate during classroom interactions, this area is worth to be studied and explored further. Therefore, this study attempts to study the use of questioning techniques as a strategy to enhance students' responses during English Language lessons.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Schools are places where students are taught specific knowledge and skills that help them to maximize their learning potential. In order to ensure effective teaching and learning takes place, both teacher and students should interact to negotiate meanings. However, teaching practitioners have to strive hard in fulfilling this goal. This is because the students' unwillingness to participate in class actively has increased in recent years. For example, it is quite frequent to see students reluctant to speak up in the lessons when teacher call for volunteers.

General reluctance will lead to a situation where only a few students continue to answer the questions and the rest do not. The reasons for a student's reluctance to communicate in class are varied. It can stem from the fear of being judged by people, lack of language proficiency, anxiety, fear for losing face and fear for making mistakes (Cohen & Norst, 1989). Due to these reasons, students are more likely to stay silent for the entire period until they are called upon to answer questions.

Actually, students should be pushed to speak in class because this can help them to facilitate their language learning meaningfully. For instance, students are said to make linguistic progress when they are given the opportunities to speak and express themselves in a variety of situations (Goldenberg, 1991; Wong Fillmore, 1985; Nam and Lewis, 2000). Therefore, it is deemed necessary for the teacher to help the students to overcome their feelings of insecurity and fear. Otherwise, this can definitely slow down the students' progress and impede the students' success in language learning.

Thus, it is important for teachers to create a positive atmosphere in class. The placement of students in a safe and comfortable environment will enable them to build up their confidence and self esteem, and hence, making their learning more enjoyable. In order to achieve this purpose, teachers should employ different types of questioning techniques to encourage students to use the target language in class effectively.

Hence, in this study, the researcher's main focus is on the frequency of questioning in the classrooms, types of questions (display or referential question), questioning techniques (prompting, probing, redirecting or rephrasing question) and the students' responses to these questions. It is fervently hoped that this study could lead the researcher to look into some useful questioning techniques that can encourage students to give their responses in class.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study is carried out for the following objectives:

- (a) to determine the average number of questions asked by teachers during an English language lesson.
- (b) to identify the types of questions used by teachers during an English language lesson.
- (c) to identify the questioning techniques used by teachers during an English language lesson.

- (d) to identify whether teachers' questioning techniques vary with students of different proficiency levels.
- (e) to analyse whether teachers' questioning techniques help in building students' responses during English Language lessons.

1.4 Research Questions

Consistent with the above objectives, the research questions for this study are:

- (a) what is the average number of questions asked by teachers during an English language lesson?
- (b) what are the types of questions used by teachers during an English language lesson?
- (c) what are the types of questioning techniques used by teachers during an English language lesson?
- (d) how teachers' questioning techniques vary with students of different proficiency levels?
- (e) what kind of questioning techniques help in building students' responses during English lessons?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The main focus of this study is the use of questioning techniques as a strategy to develop students' responses in English language lessons. This study is important because skills in questioning have become a vital component for effective teaching. Questioning techniques for instance, serve as one of the vital aspects in classroom interaction and is essential to good teaching (Klein, Peterson & Simington, 1991; Nunan & Lamb, 1996). Due to this reason, numerous studies concerning teacher questioning have been rigorously researched in many parts of the world. However, limited research has been done on teacher questioning strategies in the Malaysian classroom context. For example, there is only a study

focused on the dimension of classroom questioning practiced by secondary school teachers in Malaysia. As a result, the researcher aims to fill in the gap.

Besides, the findings from this study are also useful for in-service teachers who do not know how to apply the knowledge of asking questions into classroom contexts. This is crucially important because effective questioning does not happen to teachers who have extensive experiences in teaching. The fact is further proven when a research on teacher questioning in language education revealed that teachers still have the problems of using a wider range of questions. In fact, most of the questions asked in class are of a lower level (Nunan & Lamb, 1996). Therefore, the information drawn from this study could make the teachers aware of the weaknesses in their current techniques and hence, provide these teachers with some questioning techniques that they can employ to promote the students to think and most importantly, get them to involve in classroom interactions actively.

In addition, this research is also useful for novice teachers who do not know how to get students to respond in class. This is because they are the inexperienced ones who have just embark on their teaching careers. Thus, they might not know much about the effective questioning techniques that they can use in getting students to speak in class. Therefore, this study could provide novice teachers with some useful questioning strategies that they can employ in getting students to respond in the classroom.

1.6 Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Questioning Technique

According to Hickman (n.d.), questioning technique refers to the pursuit of knowledge characterized by the skillful use of language and patterns of questioning to examine understanding and discover truth. Proper questioning techniques are crucially important because it stimulates students to think, encourage learning, monitor students' progress and increase their participation

(Graham, 2007). In this study, questioning technique refers to the use of display, referential, prompting, probing, redirecting and rephrasing questions to build students' responses in class.

1.6.2 Questioning Frequency

Eggen & Kauchak (2004) states that questioning frequency is the number of times a teacher poses questions during an instructional period. Questioning frequency is being studied as it is believed that the more questions a teacher asks, the more effective the students will be (Morine-Dershimer, 1987). In this study, questioning frequency refers to the number of questions asked by teachers during an English language lesson.

1.6.3 Display Question

Display question refers to a type of question used in eliciting a single response. In other words, it refers to a question in which the teacher already knows the answer (Long & Sato, 1983). Unlike referential question, display question is the type of question that teachers usually ask when they want to check whether their students have learnt what has been taught. An example of a display question is 'what is the opposite of fat in English?'

1.6.4 Referential Question

According to Long & Sato (1983), referential question refers to a type of question where a teacher does not have a single correct answer, but are interested in listening to the students' answers. In short, it is a type of question that requires students to provide longer and complex responses. An example of a referential question is 'what is the difference between a market and a shopping mall?'

1.6.5 Prompting Question

According to Eggen & Kauchak (1989), prompting question refers to a technique where a teacher asks questions (giving cues, asking interim questions) that elicit for a student's response after the student has failed to answer a previous question or has given an incorrect or incomplete answer. The value of prompting question has been supported by teachers as it helps in providing more benefit to learning than other choices (Anderson et al., 1979; Stallings & Kaskowitz, 1974). An example of a prompting question is 'if $5 + 5$ equals to 10, then what is the answer for $5 + 7$?'

1.6.6 Probing Question

According to Cruickshank et al. (1999), probing question refers to a type of questioning technique where a teacher focuses his or her attention on the important aspects of the question that enable students to improve their responses. An example of a probing question is 'what do you mean, can you show us how you did that '.

1.6.7 Redirecting Question

According to Cruickshank et al. (1999), redirecting question refers to a type of questioning technique where a teacher asks several students to respond to the same question, in light of the previous response. An example of a redirecting question is 'in response to the previous answer, giving birth is painful. Student A, what do you think about this issue?'.

1.6.8 Rephrasing Question

According to Cruickshank et al. (1999), rephrasing question refers to a type of questioning technique where the teacher restates the same question in different terms. An example of a rephrasing question is ‘what can you contribute to your family? How can you contribute to your family?’.

1.6.9 Students’ Responses

According to Dashwood (2005), students’ responses refer to the students’ voice whose role is represented by a less vocal membership category in the class. A student’s response is important because it has the potential to improve their participation and achievement in class (Roschelle, Penuel & Abrahamson, 2004). In this study, students’ responses refer to the ability of the students to answer a teacher’s question with a specific correct answer or with a longer and syntactically complex answer.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the use of questioning techniques as a strategy to enhance students’ responses during English language lessons in a secondary school. Therefore, the result of this study will only show the average number of questions, types of questions, questioning techniques and students’ responses to these questions. It is hoped that after examining all these aspects, teachers are able to have a thorough understanding of how different types of questioning techniques can encourage students to participate more in class. This study cannot be generalized to questioning techniques used in other schools because this study is only carried out at a selected secondary school in Kuching and the other schools are not included as the subjects of this study. Hence, this study is an in-depth analysis to identify questioning techniques employed by teachers to build students’ responses in class.